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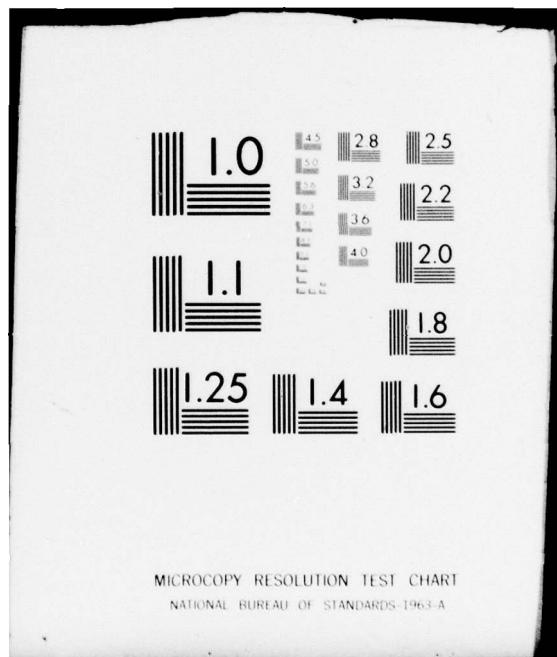
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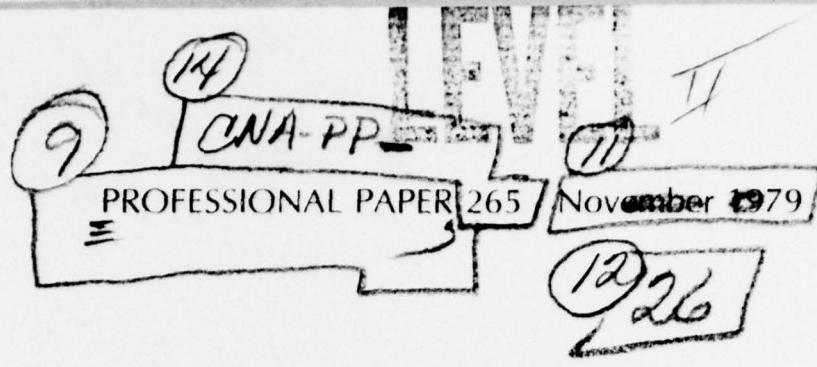
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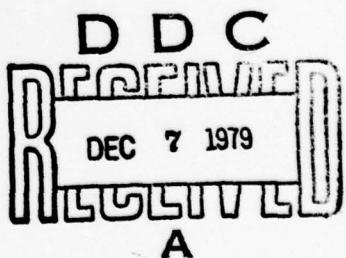


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WAR AND PEACE IN THE NORTH: SOME POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHANGING MILITARY SITUATION IN NORTHERN EUROPE.

10 Robert G. Weinland

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Institute of Naval Studies ✓

CENTER FOR NAVAL ANALYSES

2000 North Beauregard Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22311

War and Peace in the North:
Some Political Implications of the
Changing Military Situation in
Northern Europe

Robert G. Weinland
Center for Naval Analyses

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on the Nordic Balance in Perspective:
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THIS REPORT DISCLOSES THE VIEWPOINT

Personal report

This is a personal perspective. ^{The author's} I will be presenting ^{his} own definition of the situation and what can and should be done about it, not the views of the U.S. Government. It is a somewhat unusual perspective -- not that of a policy-maker, military person or systems analyst but ^{of} a political scientist who concentrates his attention on the antecedents and consequences of naval operations in general, and those of the Soviet navy in particular. I think I can describe this perspective rather succinctly if you will grant me two rather crude differentiations: between capabilities and intentions, and between the Soviets and the West. Using those categories, I would characterize this perspective as featuring some expertise in Soviet capabilities and intentions, a working knowledge of Western capabilities, and general ignorance of Western intentions -- except for what one reads in the newspapers.

That ignorance requires one amendment to the opening caveat: that my perspective does not represent the views of the U.S. Government. I don't actually know that we don't share the same view, but I would be surprised if the overlap were total. In any event, I'm not here representing them -- a fact I'm sure those who are will be glad to confirm when I'm finished.

I entitled this discussion "War and Peace in the North" because I wanted to discuss both situations in that context. I subtitled it as I did because, as I see things, changes in the military situation are raising political problems there; and the political situation dictates that these problems be solved by military means.

The authors

SHOULD

Logic suggests that one address the problem in terms of six
not-quite-mutually-exclusive questions:

- 1. how a war in Europe might start -- to give the necessary
structure to the second subject;
- 2. how the Soviets might fight such a war;
- 3. the preparations they appear to have made to do so;
- 4. the manner in which they exploit those preparations in
peacetime;
- 5. the problems those intentions, capabilities and actions
cause for the West; and
- 6. what the West can -- and in certain instances should --
do about it.

Dealing adequately with all six of those questions would take more time than is available. It would also force the discussion far outside the Northern area. Consequently, given the special character of this forum, it seems reasonable to collapse some of those questions, reformulate others, and focus the discussion on four points:

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- 1. how a war in Europe might start;
 - 2. one of the two principal ways in which what happens at sea in the North could have a decisive impact on the outcome of a European war;
 - 3. what has been referred to rather widely as "the military buildup on the Kola Peninsula" -- this will be an attempt to provide both a military assessment and a political assessment of the changing Soviet force structure in the North; and

4. a menu of actions (or, more accurately, reactions) for the West -- explicitly designed to raise questions rather than provide answers.

Let's move directly to the first of the four questions on this agenda: How might a war in Europe start? And let's begin by discussing what isn't likely. The first unlikely cause of war is a Soviet attempt at a disarming strike against U.S., British and French strategic offensive forces and nuclear-capable non-strategic forces based in Europe. They can have no confidence that the West will in fact be disarmed; and, who knows, we might even launch on warning. The second unlikely cause of such a war is a straightforward Soviet attempt to conquer all of Western Europe. As NATO intends, the risks of escalation are simply too high. The third unlikely cause is an attempt at fait accompli occupation of some part of Western Europe -- the "limited grab" scenario. That would galvanize a reaction by the rest of NATO that in the long run the Soviets couldn't handle. Or, so it seems to me.

What is a likely cause of conflict on or near the central front in Europe is the escalation or expansion of a conflict outside of Europe (another war in the Middle East, for instance). At some point in such a conflict, either because they thought it was going to expand anyway, or in order to be able to prosecute the conflict outside Europe more effectively -- for example, by forcing NATO powers to shift their attention (and perhaps even withdraw some or all of their forces) from the periphery to the center -- the Soviets might decide to take some kind of military

action in Europe. Military actions taken in Europe seem likely to stimulate military reactions; and violent action-reaction processes can get out of hand rather easily. Thus, 1914 may well be a better analog to the likely future than 1939-1940. Even though it implies a war no one really wants, it implies a far from insignificant conflict arising more or less unexpectedly, and one fought very close to the limits of the participants' capabilities.

Even if this should turn out to be a valid observation, it does not imply that NATO should disregard a "surprise attack" planning scenario. It could well be attacked before it was fully prepared. But the attacker might well be equally unprepared -- and if that were the case, the pace of the conflict in the opening phase probably would be significantly slower than that usually envisaged.

Let's move on to the second question: Why is the North so important to both the Soviets and NATO? The answer is simply because the outcome of a NATO war could be determined up there. It wouldn't necessarily be, but it could be. The critical issue in the North is control of vital areas of sea and air space in the Norwegian and North Seas. It could be critical because, depending on questions of escalation, how long it takes the West to contain the Soviet advance on the central front, and the manner in which both the Soviets and the West decide to fight the war at sea, control of those areas could affect both the strategic balance between the superpowers and the balance of forces at the forward edge of the battle area. If they could not establish and

maintain control of those areas, the Soviets might lose a significant fraction of their strategic deterrent. On the other hand, if NATO could not establish and maintain control of some of those same areas, its ability to restore the status quo ante could be impaired significantly: the United States might be prevented from moving the necessary men and materiel across the Atlantic (and up to the front) to push the Soviet forces back to the starting line. In other words, although neither side could win the war by winning up there, either side could lose heavily by losing in the North.

It needn't turn out that way however; and both superpowers have taken steps to insure that it doesn't. Some of those steps are worth examining more closely.

I suspect that the situation in which the Soviets find themselves today is probably the more serious one. Consequently, concentrating on their SSBN security problem rather than on NATO's problem of defending lines of communication makes some sense in this forum. The former is less well understood and I would imagine no less relevant to Nordic concerns.

Let us start with four widely-recognized facts. First, all of the Soviets' submarines are noisier than they should be -- presumably this applies to their nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) as well. This makes them potentially vulnerable to detection (and presumably kill) by Western anti-submarine warfare (ASW) forces -- attack submarines and aircraft in particular. Second, most of their submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) have less range than they should have. This means that, in order to strike the United States (the most likely target for most of those missiles) most of

their SSBNs have to deploy into the open ocean. Third, 70 percent of those SSBNs are homeported in the Northern Fleet. And fourth, less than 15 percent of their SSBNs are routinely kept on station.

Given this predicament, which must have been obvious to them by the late 1960s or very early 1970s at the latest, what are the Soviets going to do when a war starts? Since they carry intercontinental-range missiles, the Soviets can pull their DELTA class SSBNs away from their piers up along the Kola Peninsula and be ready to fire immediately. However, the missiles on the YANKEE class SSBNs, which will continue to constitute the major part of their SLBM force for some time to come, can't hit the U.S.A. from the Kola area. Consequently, if they are going to be used early in the war, the YANKEEs will have to transit out into the Central Atlantic. But if they do, they will have to cross the ASW barriers NATO plans to erect in forward defense of its transatlantic sea lines of communication. A lot of them probably won't make it. And the opening phase of a war is not a particularly good time to have your deterrent start to disappear.

The Soviets don't have many attractive choices in this matter. They could try to convoy the YANKEEs to those barriers and attempt to break them through; but they don't really have the air cover necessary to protect the convoying/"barrier-busting" forces (or won't have that air cover until more KIEVS with more capable aircraft than the FORGER join the Northern Fleet inventory). Alternatively, they could simply leave the YANKEEs up north with the DELTAs and hope that they don't have to use them -- or that, if they do, when the time comes to move the YANKEEs into range of their targets

the capabilities of NATO's barrier forces will have been degraded sufficiently for them to penetrate with relative safety. But that won't solve their whole problem, since, being noisier than they should be, those SSBNs could be as vulnerable to detection up in the Barents Sea as they would be down in the Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap. It looks as though they will need protection wherever they are operating. Now that protection would be far easier for the Soviets to provide, and far harder for the West to overcome or circumvent, up in the Barents. And to make an already long story somewhat shorter, the latter appears to be what the Soviets have in mind: keeping many if not most of their SSBNs up north; providing them with a significant amount of direct protection; and devoting a significant proportion of their naval general purpose forces to that task.

There are two observations to be made about this SSBN protection task. First, it competes for some of the same resources as other general purpose tasks -- like interdicting NATO's lines of communications -- and it appears to be winning that competition. Second, it explains a lot of what has been happening on and around the Kola Peninsula.

This brings us to the third question on the agenda: What's going on in the Soviet North -- specifically in the Northern and Baltic Fleets? A look at their force structures shows three trends, none of which is either particularly new or particularly alarming, and all three of which are visible navy-wide. First, these forces are not growing larger: some components (like the SSBN force) are increasing in size; others (their complement of ocean-going surface combatants, for example) are remaining rather stable; still others

(like the general purpose submarine force) are growing smaller. Second, major systems in all three fleet arms -- submarine, surface and air -- are being replaced. With the exception of the KIEV/FORGER combination, the new systems being introduced represent substantial improvements over, but perform the same functions as, the systems they are replacing. Third, the newer and more capable units are being shifted to the flanks.

These trends and their effects can be seen most readily by focusing on the general purpose force. Let us look first at the surface component. Since 1960, the number of major surface combatants in the Soviet Navy has fluctuated between 240 and 212, the average being 231. Last year they had 230 units. Again since 1960, the Navy's major surface combatant force has consisted of roughly 25 cruisers, 100 destroyers, and 100 ocean-going escorts. The number of these units available for operations in the North (combining the Northern Fleet and Baltic Fleet inventories) has not changed significantly either. In 1973 there were 97 such units in the two fleets; in 1977 there were 100.

But this quantitative stability masks two very important changes. The first is a significant qualitative upgrading of unit capabilities as older ships are retired and new ones constructed. The second is a shift in capabilities of the force as a whole. The Baltic Fleet has lost the old units and the Northern Fleet has acquired the new ones -- and many of those new units appear to be optimized for specific tasks, like protecting the SSBN force.

The general purpose submarine component has also experienced significant change. In contrast to the stability apparent in the

surface arm, the non-strategic portion of the submarine arm has experienced significant fleet-wide numerical decline. In 1959 the Soviet Navy had 450 general purpose submarines. In 1977 it had 234. But the submarine force shows the same pattern as the surface force in distribution of new construction. New systems go to the Northern Fleet and the Baltic Fleet gets to keep what's left over.

These individual changes have produced one very important overall change in the general purpose submarine force, which in turn has altered the Soviet Navy's capabilities in certain warfare areas. The submarine force is becoming less a general purpose and more a special purpose force. This is a combined function of the decreasing size of the force and the increasing specialization of the new units it is acquiring. These new units tend to be optimized for specific tasks. To once again make a lengthening story shorter, when coupled with the more demanding character of immediate priority defensive tasks -- ASW in defense of the strategic deterrent; ASW and anti-carrier warfare in defense of the homeland -- these changes in the size and character of the Soviet submarine force have resulted in a reduction in the Navy's capability to undertake offensive tasks, like interdicting the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) across the Atlantic. And whether that decrease will be balanced by the increase in the air threat to those SLOCs represented by the acquisition of BACKFIRE remains to be seen. It might. But as indicated earlier, that is a different story.

That much of the upgrading of the capabilities of the Northern Fleet appears related to inter- rather than intra-continental tasks, and has been accomplished at the cost of a relative downgrading of

the capabilities of the Baltic Fleet, can provide some comfort to Norway and Denmark -- but not much. Defending Soviet SSBNs will be easier if the West is denied the facilities and airfields in Northern Norway. Getting Soviet SSBNs (and, for that matter, their anti-shipping forces) into the Atlantic will be easier if the Soviets can use the airfields in Southern Norway. This, and a high priority task not yet mentioned -- protecting the flanks of Warsaw Pact ground forces fighting on the central front -- requires not only denying the West entry into the Baltic, but gaining positive control of the Baltic exits, so they can be used for Pact purposes. In other words, the practical results for the Nordic states are the same as if the Soviets had only local, territorial objectives in the area. And the practical results in terms of what NATO as a whole must do are also the same. It must retain control of the vital areas of the Norwegian and North Seas, not to mention the North Atlantic.

Practical results also characterize a lot of Soviet behavior in this area, in particular, their penchant for attempting to get the maximum political mileage possible from military developments. As indicated, they would like very much to be able to exercise control over some of the same vital sea and air space in the North as would NATO. And they would like to acquire that ability as cheaply as possible. In their view, the cheapest and most effective way to do this is to establish a position of predominance in an area that is sufficient to deter potential opponents from contesting it. In order to accomplish that, they consider two things to be necessary. The first is a not-unfavorable -- from the Soviets' point of view -- real correlation of forces (just in case they

have to fight). The second is a decidedly unfavorable -- from their opponents' point of view -- perception of that correlation of forces. The Soviets consciously manipulate their forces to affect those perceptions -- not only out in the Third World (where most people expect them to do that) but in the Nordic area as well (where few have that same expectation).

There has been a buildup of Soviet naval and other military capabilities on the Kola Peninsula over the last few years, but not what is commonly thought. In the same vein, there have been very real and very significant changes in the Soviet navy as a whole over the last decade, but not what is commonly thought. The most significant change in the Soviet navy over the last ten years actually may be the change that has occurred in its use. Prior to the mid-60s, it was a war-fighting tool only; since then it has been turned into an instrument of political influence as well -- and in the process it has become a salient feature of the peacetime political environment, even in the North. Its peacetime activities -- especially the highly publicized fleet exercises like Okean and Vesna -- are only in part Soviet preparation for wartime. In part, they are also vehicles for influencing potential opponents' preparations for wartime -- in ways, of course, favorable to Soviet ends.

Although it isn't really, by judicious use of their forces the Soviets have managed to create the impression that they have a global navy. By exercising it rather frequently and quite visibly out in the Norwegian Sea/North Atlantic area, they have managed to create the impression that it has a "dominant position" in that area, that the Soviet Union's "legitimate defensive perimeter" is

down at the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, and that it would not be cost-effective for potential opponents to contest with it for control of the area north of the gap.

I submit that by allowing those impressions to go unchallenged, the West is doing itself a disservice. That proposition brings us to the last of the four topics on the agenda: A menu of actions that the West could -- and in some cases should -- take. And let me just reiterate here the point I made in the beginning: this is my menu. It isn't necessarily complete, it doesn't necessarily feature the most desirable items, and it is as unofficial as it can be.

Let us continue to divide this discussion into two separate but I submit not-unrelated areas: peacetime and wartime. It is vitally important that the West neither neglect, nor focus single-mindedly, on wartime Europe. In many respects, what happens in peacetime (or however you want to refer to the period between now and when the balloon goes up), and what happens outside Europe, are just as important.

There are three areas where peacetime action is necessary. First, specific steps must be taken to increase the confidence with which the members of NATO (and the neutral states of Europe as well) view the correlation of forces in the European theater. Among other things, this means taking direct action to neutralize the political impact of Soviet military muscle-flexing. I will return to this point in a minute.

Appearances mean a lot, but so do realities. If it isn't obviously so now, NATO's deterrent must be strengthened to the point where aggression against Western Europe once again becomes -- and

can remain -- a thoroughly unattractive proposition.

But, as indicated at the outset, deliberate aggression isn't the only danger. Accident, or more likely injudicious action, taken under pressure, could well lead to conflict in Europe. And this means that attention must be paid not only to preparation for a potential conflict in Europe but also to the management of actual conflict outside Europe. Two problems must be dealt with here: containing escalation in whatever extra-European conflicts occur and containing the conflict-enhancing behavior of the European powers likely to be involved in such conflicts.

The Soviet Union is one such power; and it is vitally important in all three areas just mentioned that the Soviet Union not be allowed to develop an exaggerated estimate of its own capabilities, or an unrealistically low opinion of either the capabilities of NATO or its will to use them if necessary.

This brings us directly back to the questions of political impact and what to do about it -- and here I would like to advance a modest proposal.

On the average of twice a year, the Soviets hold a major fleet exercise in the North Atlantic-Norwegian Sea area. These exercises have three primary functions: training, test and evaluation of new equipment and procedures, and image-building. There is a standard NATO response to these exercises: it deploys its intelligence-collection assets and participates with the Soviets in the evaluation of their new equipment and procedures, and it mobilizes its public affairs officer corps to point out the threat represented by Soviet presence and activities off its coasts.

Once a year, NATO holds a major fleet exercise in the same

area. This exercise has similar training and test and evaluation objectives. It is also designed to demonstrate NATO's capability to penetrate the Norwegian Sea in support of the northern flank. There is a standard Soviet response to this exercise: like NATO, they deploy intelligence-collection assets to participate in the evaluation of new equipment and procedures; but unlike NATO they also use the opportunity provided by the proximity of their potential opponent's forces to demonstrate the capabilities of their own forces. In other words, they mount a counter-exercise.

NATO should seriously consider doing the same thing. It could respond to the deployment of Soviet forces outside their home waters by activating its air and sea control forces -- conducting, as it were, an exercise of opportunity against targets of opportunity, utilizing resources maintained in the theater and reinforcements from North America. These forces would, of course, observe the same ground rules observed by the Soviets in their evolutions.

The primary objective of doing all of this would be simply to inject a bit of realism into Soviet exercise play -- and into everyone's perceptions of Soviet capabilities. No threat would be posed to the Soviet Union. The area in which this activity would take place is, after all, off the coasts of NATO, not the Warsaw Pact. The more you think about it, the less bizarre it sounds. There are other things one could do, but time -- and prudence -- dictate that we move on from peace to war.

There are a variety of actions that NATO can take in wartime. The two most pressing questions about these actions are: which of them should be undertaken, and by whom. Both of these questions have been asked, and answered, before; but as critical aspects of

the situation change -- and the growth of Soviet capabilities in the North represents just such a change -- these answers need to be reexamined to see if they retain their validity. The current and foreseeable future balance between wartime tasks in the European theater and the capabilities of the Atlantic Alliance as a whole to perform those tasks suggests the following division of labor between the European and North American members of the Alliance.

The Europeans, it seems to me, should concentrate on two tasks. The first is to deny the aggressor the accomplishment of his immediate objectives -- which, in practical terms, means containing his advance on the ground. The second is to limit the amount of damage he is able to cause, a task that has two equally important aspects: self-protection, and protection of the infrastructure necessary to bring the resources of the North American members of the Alliance to bear on the situation.

The Americans, it seems to me, should concentrate on two different tasks. The first is to keep the conflict limited -- by continuing to pose a credible threat to impose disproportionate and excessive costs on the aggressor if the conflict is not contained or escalates. The second is to provide the capabilities (manpower, weapons and supplies) necessary to reverse the situation and restore the status quo ante -- i.e., to deny the aggressor the accomplishment of his ultimate objectives.

This raises the question of which actions it is appropriate for the United States to take in a European war. The following list of actions -- presented in order of decreasing assurance that they should be undertaken -- illustrates what is at issue. Should the United States:

1. contribute to the pre-war, and provide most of the intra-war, nuclear deterrent;
2. provide, as soon as possible, conventional reinforcements and supplies;
3. transport those resources across the Atlantic and, where appropriate, deliver them to the conflict area;
4. provide direct defense of the transatlantic lines of communication;
5. contribute to the forward defense of the transatlantic and intra-theater lines of communication -- by attriting enemy offensive forces enroute to their targets;
6. contribute to the direct defense of intra-theater lines of communication; and
7. participate, if not take a leading role, in various aspects of theater combat -- i.e., suppression of offensive capabilities, roll-back of advanced forces?

The issue is: how far down -- or for that matter beyond -- that list is it necessary, feasible and desirable for the United States to plan to proceed? And, given the changes that are taking place in the overall balance of capabilities, with what forces should it do so?

The latter question is particularly relevant to the situation in the North. Specifically, what role can and should the U.S. Navy -- and in particular its carrier forces -- play north of the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap? I wouldn't pretend to have the answer to that. I would, however, venture two observations.

First, it is crucial to the ultimate success of NATO's defensive efforts that it not lose control over those areas of the

Norwegian and North Seas through which it could be attacked and which it must utilize for its own purposes. And since, given the balance of capabilities in that area, control of the air is going to be a sine qua non of sea control, then regardless of what else it elects to do, if it wants to be able to do those other things the United States probably should deploy, on a priority basis, reinforcing tactical air -- interceptor and attack -- forces to this region first. Given the time-urgency of such a deployment, the initial units probably would have to be drawn from the U.S. Air Force; once carrier air could be brought within range, however, some of those USAF assets could move on east to take up other tasks.

Second, the questions being raised today regarding carrier viability and effectiveness north of the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap are in many respects the same questions raised several years ago about their viability and effectiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean. Granted, the air threat in the Norwegian Sea is far greater, but so is the room for maneuver.

Now some may disagree (and they could easily be right), but I think the acquisition of new defensive systems and the prospect of revising our modus operandi to give increased emphasis to both coordinated, multi-carrier operations and the mutual support of land-based and sea-based air have all acted to reduce significantly the hesitancy previously felt about operating carriers in high threat environments. If properly employed, and properly supported, they cannot only survive but accomplish positive area control and projection tasks -- tasks difficult if not impossible to accomplish by other means. However, they probably cannot do so in such environments without sustaining losses; and that means "the game has to

be worth the candle." Which brings us right back to the central issue: where should the U.S. draw the line?

That concludes my presentation. Our chairman asked me to be provocative. I attempted to be so. I hope I haven't exceeded his expectations.

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